

ARTICLE APPEARED
PAGE A 27

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Our Skeptical Journalists

This past year, a high State Department official laments, journalists and politicians botched their response to three major news stories by leaving unread "growing evidence" of Soviet criminality. He had in mind "yellow rain," "the Bulgarian connection," and President Reagan's assertions of Soviet "manipulation" of the freeze movement.

In the case of the Soviets and the freeze, consider the Hon. Edward P. Boland, Chairman of the House Select Committee on Intelligence. When his own committee released FBI and CIA testimony supporting the president's assertions, the honorable gentleman heaved up a press release declaring, "The bottom line is that hearings provide no evidence that the Soviets direct, manage, or manipulate the nuclear freeze movement." But the president's charges stop far short of saying that the Soviets "direct" or "manage" the movement. The president has spoken of manipulation, and Edward J. O'Malley, assistant director of the FBI's intelligence division, appears in this report testifying that "The U.S. Peace Council and the World Peace Council, as well as CPUSA (American Communist Party) members, were actively involved in the planning and

implementation of the June 12 demonstration."

Or consider the reporter who in the Dec. 27 issue of Time referred to "the president's totally unsupported contention" of Soviet involvement; or NBC's Judy Woodruff, who on the "Today Show" accosted John Barron, whose Reader's Digest article was one of Reagan's sources, and declared that "there is nothing specific in what you have written in this article that links the founding of the freeze movement to Soviet agents."

Barron had reported that at least two Soviet agents were at the March 20, 1981, national strategy conference that planned the freeze movement's activities. One, KGB officer Uri S. Kapralov, "mingled with freeze armament proponents, urging them on in their efforts to abort new American weapons," says Barron, and "he was an official member of the discussion panel."

Barron cites over a dozen more examples of Soviet involvement. Add to his evidence articles in Committee of Inquiry, The American Spectator, and The Wall Street Journal. "The president's totally unsupported contention?"

In Reader's Digest, Claire Sterling provided evidence of the Bulgarian connection months ago; and The Wall Street Journal has been writing about yellow rain for 15 months. Now the Journal reports that "the conventional wisdom" has accepted its story: "Suddenly everyone understands that the Soviet Union and its allies are indeed poisoning Hmong tribesmen and Afghan resistance fighters . . ." Apparently, the State Department's display of a Red Army gas mask, unappetizingly contaminated with mycotoxins, dissolved the journalists' hearty skepticism.